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DRINK AND DRUNKENNESS IN LONDON.

BY A LONDON POLICE MAGISTRATE.

THAT the English are a drinking people it is impossible to deny in the face of the revenue returns; but that we are a drunken people is a very different proposition, to which, I am glad to say, I am unable to assent. Of the mass of our population but a very few are habitual drunkards; while of the numbers brought before magistrates charged with drunkenness a large proportion make but a single appearance, and are never seen again. Their names, however, serve to swell the returns, and an impression is thus created that there are more confirmed drunkards among us than is actually the case. Every one must be struck by the orderly conduct of large crowds in the metropolis. Whether it be at the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, at any of the great football or cricket matches, the Lord Mayor's Show, or a royal wedding, of all the thousands assembled you rarely see a single person drunk.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the prevalence of drunken habits amongst a certain number of the wage-earning classes is the cause of a vast amount of misery, and of a certain kind of crimes. Premeditated murders, burglaries, forgeries, conspiracies, frauds, etc., requiring sobriety for their success, can in no case be ascribed to strong drink; but many crimes of violence are directly attributable to its effects upon persons not naturally cruel or vicious, whilst the wretched poverty and misery that a drunken head of a family brings upon his unfortunate belongings can only be understood by those who have had exceptional opportunities of becoming acquainted with such cases.

Sometimes it is the wife who is in fault, more frequently the husband; but in either case the poor children have to suffer. When the husband is more or less given to drink the wife seems

often to be stimulated to increased exertion, and many an admirable example of devotion to duty has in the course of a somewhat lengthy experience come under my notice. How often have I longed, on hearing a wife's complaint that her husband would do no work, but spent all his time in the public house, that I could send a stout policeman, armed with a heavy whip, to lash the lazy rascal out of his bed where he would be found sleeping off the effects of the last night's debauch. Where does he get the money for drink ? you naturally ask. Sometimes he beats it out of his hard-working, sober wife ; sometimes he is treated by friends, for to have been " fou' for weeks thegither " is a strong bond of union, as we have it on no mean authority. The wives, though complaining, are generally free from vindictiveness. " The best of husbands if he would only keep from the drink," is their constant cry, and when a charge of assault has been made, or a summons granted, as often as not the wife declines to prosecute, hoping against hope that her husband may reform.

As already said, the proportion of habitual drunkards compared with those who only occasionally drink to excess is but small. After a time, however, they become conspicuous, as the newspapers help to make them notorious by recording the number of their appearances in the police courts. Judging by my own feelings, I cannot but think that most magistrates dislike the frequent reappearance of the same individual on the same kind of charge. It carries with it a reproach like that which a doctor in full practice may be supposed to feel when his (let us say dyspeptic) patient returns again and again. His mere presence suggests that the treatment has failed. But how such treatment as a magistrate can, under the present law, prescribe for the drunkard could possibly succeed, it is difficult to imagine. Probably it was never thought or intended that it would have curative or reformatory effect. Instead of making him better, it is more likely to make him worse. The highest sentence that can be pronounced at present is a month's imprisonment with hard labor in a common prison. When the man or woman comes out of jail at the end of the month, weak from low diet and feeling depressed and miserable, what more natural than that he should immediately have recourse to stimulants, the want of which, his feelings tell him, has brought him to such a pass. Thus it often happens that on the first day of his recovered

freedom he is drunk again, and appears in court the following morning, to the great discomfiture of the magistrate, who can only repeat the same treatment which has so lamentably failed.

That the system requires attention, nobody who knows anything of its working can doubt; and this has been generally recognized. Indeed, several bills have from time to time been introduced into Parliament within the last twenty years, the main object of all of them being to give greater powers of restraint over inebriates; but not one of these bills has found its way into the Statute Book. The subject, however, has been constantly pressed upon the notice of successive governments, and in 1893 a Departmental Committee, at the head of which was Mr. Wharton, M. P., was appointed to inquire into the treatment of inebriates. This committee held many sittings and obtained much evidence from persons conversant with the subject, and I believe all were agreed that our present system had proved a complete failure, so far as the reformation of the habitual drunkard was concerned.

In the course of the enquiry Mr. Murdoch, of the Home Office, a member of the committee, produced an act of the Legislature of Victoria, in which colony several attempts have, it seems, been made to deal with the subject of habitual drunkenness. This act is styled "The Inebriate Asylums' Act, 1888," and it begins by repealing the "Inebriates' Act, 1872," and also a subsequent act amending it, thus showing that the subject had engaged the attention of the Parliament of the colony for a considerable time. The principal provisions of this act of 1888 may be shortly stated. "Inebriate" is defined to mean "any person in reference to whom, whether by himself or by any other person, any application for detention or treatment shall be, or shall have been, made under the act." The governor in council is empowered to direct that any asylum, or any part of any asylum, or any other building named in the order, shall be an asylum for inebriates. He may appoint as superintendent of any such asylum a person who must be a medical practitioner. The asylum may be separated into two divisions, with a different scale of accommodations and of fees to be paid by patients and residents. Any person desirous of being committed to an asylum for inebriates may make application to the Master-in-Lunacy, or to any judge of county courts, or to a police magistrate, or to any justice who,

after satisfying himself that the applicant has habitually used excessive quantities of intoxicating drinks, may order him to be detained in an asylum for inebriates, there to be held under curative treatment for a period not exceeding three months.

We now come to the most important part of the act, which, it will be seen, goes far beyond anything as yet adopted in the mother country. By sections 8 and 9 it is provided that upon the application of the husband or wife, or any relative or friend of any person addicted to the habitual use in excess of intoxicating drinks, either of the authorities above named may, upon proof of the reasonableness of the application, summon the inebriate to show cause why he should not be committed to an asylum, and if upon the hearing it is shown that, by reason of his abuse of intoxicating drinks, the person summoned is unable to control himself and incapable of managing his affairs, or is dangerous to himself or others, or is suffering under or recovering from *delirium tremens* or chronic alcoholism, or is in imminent danger of death from the continuous use of such drinks ; and if two medical practitioners certify in writing that the person requires curative treatment in an asylum for inebriates, he may be sent to one for a term not exceeding three months. Under the tenth section the inebriate may apply to any of the same authorities to have the order reconsidered, and they have power to rescind it and to make such order as to costs as they deem fit. By the fifteenth section the same authorities, or any of them, if in their opinion it is necessary or desirable for the curative treatment or care of an inebriate that a second or subsequent order of detention should be made, may make one. Power is given to apprehend any escaped inebriate, and to take him back to the asylum, there to remain until the expiration of the period named in the order ; and there are various other provisions for the protection of the inebriate when in confinement, for his punishment when unruly, for the payment of his maintenance, and other matters.

It will be seen, however, from the short abstract I have given of the act, that it attempts at all events to deal with this class of cases by a curative method, while we have been content to rely on punishment alone. It should be added here that Mr. James Munro, formerly Prime Minister of Victoria, who gave evidence before the committee, stated as his opinion that the act had not been attended with much success, owing, as I understand him,

not only to the scale of charges being too high, but to other faulty arrangements. Moreover, the experiment was made on a very small scale. However, notwithstanding this rather discouraging account of the operation of the Colonial Act, the committee, after taking a large body of evidence from clergymen, distinguished physicians, governors, and chaplains of prisons, police magistrates, and others, made amongst others the following recommendations in their report :

(1.) That power should be given for the compulsory commitment to a retreat of persons coming within the definition of an habitual drunkard, as laid down in the (English) act of 1890, on the application of their relatives or friends, or other persons interested in their welfare, such application to be made to any Judge of the High Court, County Court Judge, Stipendiary Magistrate, or Justice sitting in Quarter or Petty Sessions, who shall decide on the propriety of the application.

(2.) That reformatory institutions should be provided, aided by contributions from imperial and local funds, towards the cost of their building and maintenance (as in the case of existing reformatories and industrial institutions for juvenile offenders), for the reception and detention of criminal habitual drunkards, who might be subjected to less rigorous discipline than in existing prisons and to the performance of such labors as may be prescribed. (3.) That magistrates should have the power to commit to such reformatory institutions for lengthened periods with or without previous punishment or imprisonment habitual drunkards (*a.*) who come within the action of the criminal law ; (*b.*) who fail to find required sureties and recognizances ; (*c.*) who have been brought up for breach of such recognizances ; (*d.*) who are proved guilty of ill treatment or neglect of their wives and families ; (*e.*) who have been convicted of drunkenness three or more times within the previous twelve months.

It seems to be generally agreed amongst the witnesses who were examined by the committee that it was quite hopeless to effect the cure of a habitual drunkard within a less period than twelve months ; and this such high authorities as the late Sir Andrew Clark and Sir Richard Quain gave as their opinion. Lengthened periods of detention for the habitual drunkard, even if they failed to cure, would have this good effect at least, that his pernicious example would be removed for a time.

Before going further, perhaps it may not be without interest if I recall one or two cases of habitual drunkards that have come under my notice. The most notorious of these was a woman named Jane Cakebread whose name must be familiar to all readers of the London newspapers. She was a curious creature who never seemed to be in the least disconcerted by her frequent appearance in court. Tall, spare, and strong, with a plain but rather pleasing countenance, she always appeared in the dock as neat as circumstances would permit. Whatever her language and conduct may have been in the street, as to which the constable used to give awful accounts, in court it was uniformly correct. She seldom or never found fault with the constable who had arrested her; owned she might have had a glass or two too much, but made light of the matter and promised amendment. What she liked above all things was to be allowed to talk of the great respectability of her relations at Bishop's Stratford, and, when you allowed her to run on for a little about them, everything went smoothly and well. She was satisfied with her sentence, whatever it might be, curtsied to the Bench, and, as she tripped out of court, nodded and smiled at the jailer as if to say: "You needn't show *me* the way to the cells," and by her contented and cheerful aspect and demeanor would so please every one in court, magistrate included, that the sadder aspect of the case was lost sight of in a general sense of satisfaction.

Such was Jane Cakebread in the days when my interviews with her were frequent. Years have passed since then, and she is now, I believe, confined in a lunatic asylum, but, knowing her as I did, I can scarcely believe that she is subject to any delusion except the belief that she could go on through years and years of hard drinking without sooner or later incurring the inevitable penalty. She had a splendid constitution, and, as she never seemed in the morning to feel any ill-effects from the bout of the previous night, she was probably a stranger to the salutary check which a bad headache supplies. A century ago she might have held her own even with the three-bottle men of the time.

Another notorious woman, whose name is scarcely less known than Cakebread's, generally chose to call herself Totty Fay, though she had a number of more high-sounding aliases. My first acquaintance with her arose out of a most scandalous escapade, which was succeeded by others more or less serious, all

having their origin in drink. She became a confirmed drunkard and lost any good looks she ever possessed, and when last I saw her in court had a dirty, bedraggled look, her feathers and other finery being in a woeful condition. Like Jane Cakebread she had always the same story, with but slight variation, to lay before the Court. It ran somewhat after this fashion: "I am a most unfortunate young lady, your Worship, or I shouldn't be here before you to-day. You see, sir, it's like this: my poor, dear landlady, a most kind, amiable woman, had a distress for rent put in yesterday, so I went with her to the public house just to be out of the way of the beastly broker's men; and, well, I don't think it was the little drink we had so much as the grief I felt for the poor woman. But, your Worship, am I to be handled like this by a common policeman? Look here, you fellow" (showing her bruised arm to the constable), "what right have you to handle a young lady like this? I will report you to your betters and have the coat off your back, see if I don't."

Sometimes it was her dear mother whose unexpected arrival in town had led to a little conviviality; but in every case her references to herself as an unfortunate young lady formed the staple of her harangue, which I always found it more politic to allow her to deliver at length. I have lost sight of her now for several years, and I understand that she is undergoing a long term of imprisonment for a more serious offence than being drunk and disorderly.

I am not much of an optimist, yet I declare—taking these two women as representing the worst of the class of habitual drunkards—that I believe they might have been reformed, if taken in hand in time. That is the essential condition in all such cases—they must not be too far gone.

Of the many drunkards of the other sex who have come repeatedly before me, I retain but indistinct recollection. They seem to be less imaginative (dare I say it?) than the women. At any rate, they either have nothing to say, or nothing that strikes and fixes itself on the memory. Two I recall as being something out of the ordinary run. One is a shoeblack, a short, thickset fellow who seems steeped in drink, which is not surprising, seeing that he has made more than two hundred appearances in the same court. He always promises not to get drunk again, and I have occasionally accepted his promise on the con-

stable's admission that he went quietly to the station. But, of course, he is soon back again, when he is reminded of his promise before sentence. This he generally takes very resignedly.

Another, quite a young fellow, is a decidedly dangerous customer, though he has only one leg. But he can get about nimbly and quickly on his wooden leg and with the help of a crutch, even when pretty far gone in liquor. When he sees a constable coming to arrest him, he promptly makes for the nearest wall or railing, supported by which he shoulders his crutch, and makes ready for battle, so that unless the constable succeeds in summoning assistance, he has rather a risky time of it before he takes his man. This youth I believe to be an irreclaimable blackguard.

Passing reference has been made to the repeated efforts of members of Parliament in our own day to deal by fresh legislation with drunkards and drunkenness, and the appointment of the Royal Commission, now sitting under the presidency of Viscount Peel, to inquire into the whole subject of liquor and the licensing laws, testifies to the anxiety felt throughout the country upon a subject so closely connected with its well-being and good government. The Commission is large and representative, and has already taken a mass of evidence from men of various professions, occupations, and pursuits, whose experience enables them to speak with knowledge on some of the many questions which appertain to an enquiry so comprehensive, an enquiry which the chairman seems resolved to make full and exhaustive.

What the recommendations of the Commission, if any, may be in regard to the treatment of habitual drunkards, it is, of course, impossible to predict. But I think it may safely be surmised that they will not differ materially from the conclusions of Mr. Wharton's committee. For three hundred years and more we have been levelling laws against tippling and tipplers, and those who supply them with drink. None of the punishments as yet devised has proved effectual in repressing the evil. Let us try another plan, a plan in which, although punishment finds a place, reformation is the chief endeavor and object. How can you cure a drunkard by sending him to a common prison, with hard labor, for a month? The thing is impossible, absurd. Why, then, not try a method which at least has a more hopeful look? It may fail, in many cases it probably will fail, for confirmed drunkards are not easily redeemed. But at all events it

gives promise of some success, and it must be remembered that every cure benefits not only the individual himself, but his family and all his surroundings.

So much having been said, I am bound to confess that I look more to education, with its softening and refining influence, to abate the evil, than to anything that can be effected by acts of Parliament, however well framed and however carefully carried out. In the last century gentlemen were not ashamed to come reeling into the presence of ladies, after the prolonged sittings over the bottle which were then in vogue. And the ladies themselves do not, all of them, seem to have looked with much disfavor upon such excesses. I have myself seen a letter from one young lady to another, in which the writer tells of a youth of their common acquaintance having, by way of making himself agreeable, left the toppers early in order to join the ladies. Instead of commending him for this conduct she speaks of him as a "soft hash." It was about the same time, the latter part of the eighteenth century, that three Scottish gentlemen, of good family and condition, came together with the avowed object and intention of drinking each other under the table, a meeting made memorable by Burns' humorous and spirited poem, "The Whistle":

"A Bard was selected to witness the fray,
And tell future ages the feats of the day,
A Bard who detested all sadness and spleen,
And wished that Parnassus a vineyard had been."

Feats indeed! Alas poor Bard! what a distance have we travelled since those days! Education, the influence of a clergy of higher attainments and with higher ideals than obtained in the days when Parson Adams was a type, have had most to do in bringing about a better and healthier state of things; and why may not education do for the masses what it has done for the classes? At present a drunken man in the streets causes nothing but amusement to his "pals"; let us hope the day may not be far distant when he will inspire disgust. It is to education that we must look, then, in the main, but it must be of the right kind, the kind that teaches to enquiring youth what the true foundation is upon which all good citizenship must be built.